

Promoting the Efficient Use of Water With Customers

Motivating customers to voluntarily save water can accomplish both peak-demand and annual reductions in water consumption. Customer actions as simple as reducing the amount of outdoor watering or installing water-efficient devices can reduce both peak-season and long-term system delivery needs. Educating customers on the advantages of saving water is a cost-effective way for systems to manage demand. Customers tend to be more cooperative if they are aware of system efficiency efforts.

Customer conservation actions fall into two categories:

- **Behavioral changes** – Actions such as modifying outdoor water-use patterns, taking shorter showers, and fixing leaks are simple changes that involve little or no cost to customers, and require little or no sacrifice – just a change in habits.
- **Installation of water-saving devices** – The installation of water-efficient toilets, low-flow showerheads, and low-flow faucet aerators, or planting water-efficient landscaping involve costs to the customers, but can result in significant water savings.

A consistent and sustained customer information effort is necessary to bring about the type of customer behavioral change that will yield measurable results for the system. Customer conservation campaigns that require personal financial outlay are more successful when systems first educate customers about the benefits of conserving water.

Most individuals will invest in conservation – including changing habits – only with some financial incentive. It's important to emphasize how customer conservation efforts will result in savings – for their households *and* for their water system, which will help keep rates stable.

There are three basic steps to educating customers about water conservation:

- **Establish the connection** – The first step in a successful customer campaign is to increase awareness about water system components – the source and availability of supply, treatment, storage, and distribution systems. Customers must understand the challenges facing the system and how saving water can help *their* system address water supply and delivery issues. Using water efficiently helps ensure future generations will benefit from adequate supplies of water.
- **Define wise water use practices** – Secondly, customer information efforts should educate customers about wasteful water-use practices, such as excessive watering, running partial loads in washing machines and dishwashers, unnecessary use of indoor water, letting leaks go unrepaired, and wasting water while washing cars.
- **Provide solutions** – Finally, customers should be given the information they need to make the necessary changes in behavior – ways they can save water while maintaining comfortable lifestyles.

*For assistance with
water use efficiency
planning, contact
your regional water
conservation specialist.*

Northwest

Regional Office -

253-395-6769

Southwest

Regional Office -

360-664-2543

Eastern

Regional Office -

509-456-5067



Delivering Information To Customers

Individuals receive and process information in different ways, so it's important to communicate with customers in a variety of methods and formats. It's particularly important that water conservation messages be consistent and repeatedly delivered.

The most effective approach to delivering information – “marketing” water conservation – is through a planned campaign of materials and tactics. Promoting specific conservation measures during different seasons or distributing conservation tips regularly will help conservation stand out in customers' minds. For systems with limited financial resources, a customer conservation promotion package could include:

- Brochures (libraries, businesses, utility or government offices)
- Water bill stuffers and messages printed on bill
- Door hangers
- Public signage
- Display promoting the efficient use of water
- Newspaper articles or guest editorials
- Newspaper, cable television, radio public service announcements
- Public access cable television “bulletin boards”
- Newsletter articles
- Conservation speakers (service clubs, neighborhood associations, homeowners groups, etc.)

Other customer conservation programs include the provision of free or subsidized water-efficient plumbing fixtures, residential and commercial water-use audits, and regulatory conservation requirements.

Any package of customer conservation promotional efforts should be tailored to meet the special needs and considerations of the system and its customers.

Where To Get More Information

Water Conservation Guidebook For Small and Medium-Sized Utilities, American Water Works Association, Pacific Northwest Section

Water Conservation Planning Handbook, Washington State Department of Health